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SUBJECT: DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER TALKS RELIGION AND ELECTRICITY

¶1. (SBU) Deputy Foreign Minister Abdullo Yuldashev summoned Ambassador Gross on February 25 to discuss a range of religious, economic, and political issues. On May 18-20, Tajikistan will host an Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) Foreign Ministers summit in Dushanbe and will invite U.S. Special Envoy to the OIC Rashad Hussain. Yuldashev lauded the Obama Administration's efforts to reach out to Muslim communities, citing President Obama's Cairo speech and Secretary Clinton's address to the U.S. - Islamic World Forum. Yuldashev said Tajikistan likely would sign on to OIC boiler plate statements regarding the Palestinian Territories and Kashmir, but that Tajikistan wanted good relationships with "Muslim, Non-Muslim, and atheist countries, like our friends the Chinese."

¶2. (SBU) Yuldashev shifted from religion to electricity by noting that the proposed Central Asia South Asia (CASA 1000) electricity transmission line would connect four Muslim countries in an instable region. The Tajiks and Kyrgyz would export hydropower electricity, initially only in the summer, to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Yuldashev asked for U.S. support in discussions with the Asian Development Bank, which has backed off from its earlier intention to finance 40% of the project. (The World Bank and Islamic Development Bank agreed to finance 40% and 20% of the project, respectively. Asian Development Bank representatives have told us they are awaiting the results of a feasibility study due out after May.)

¶3. (SBU) Shifting to Tajik-Uzbek relations, Yuldashev complained that the Uzbeks were unwilling to negotiate over regional energy projects and ceased supplying part of the Tajik Sughd Oblast with electricity, causing a mining venture to cease operations. "I hope now that you believe in our determination to build Roghun." He also said a rise in Islamic radicalism stemmed from Uzbekistan. "Although we never have and never will divide citizens on an ethnic basis, most of those under the influence of radical ideas are of ethnic Uzbek origin."

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: The Embassy would welcome a visit by Special Envoy Hussain to the OIC summit to emphasize the Administration's focus on improving U.S. relations with the Muslim world. On CASA 1000, raised by the Tajiks in nearly every meeting with USG officials, we will have a more solid basis for discussion after the feasibility study is completed.  
END COMMENT

GROSS